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December 13, 1978

Dear Mr. Benjamin:

The Secretary has asked me to thank you for your letter of December 4 in which you requested information about the U.S. response to the Guyana tragedy. As you know, the United States Government continues to be involved in this tragic episode and is investigating various aspects of the situation. Nevertheless, I wanted to give you an early response to the questions you have raised concerning this unprecedented matter.

On Sunday, November 19, it had become clear that the United States Government was facing a major crisis in Guyana. An American Congressman and other Americans in his party had been killed. A settlement believed to include over 1,000 Americans was involved, and its situation was uncertain. It was apparent that the Government of Guyana required assistance in handling a major emergency created by the presence of Americans within its borders.

The President, acting under his constitutional authority as Chief Executive and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, ordered the departments of our government to take action to deal with this emergency. The operational decisions within the U.S. Government in this unique situation were made by the Secretary of State in conjunction with some of his Cabinet colleagues.

Under the President's Executive authorities, medical evacuation for injured Americans was immediately ordered, and the United States Government offered assistance to the Government of Guyana to prevent further loss of life. As events progressed, it became clear that there were large numbers of Americans dead. For a time, it was believed that there were survivors in the jungle; and the United States adjusted and increased its assistance to help the search by Guyana police and military. Finally, when the full scope of the tragedy of Jonestown was clear, our Government was requested by the Government of Guyana to remove the bodies. This operation was considered essential in handling the emergency situation which existed in Guyana at the time.

The Honorable
Adam Benjamin, Jr.,
House of Representatives.

STATE A/CDC/MR

ENTERED BY _____ DATE _____

EDS or TDS. DATE _____
TS _____ REASON(S) _____
EXCISE _____ CLASSIFIED ☐
DECLASSIFIED RELEASABLE ☐
RELEASE DENIED ☐
PA or FOI EXEMPTIONS _____

The Justice Department is fully exploring possible legal remedies which can be used to recover the cost the U.S. Government has incurred in removing and processing the bodies of Americans from Guyana. Now that the emergency is substantially over, the Office of Management and Budget and other agencies are reviewing the various operations to determine the exact cost to the United States Government. Although the costs to the United States Government of an effort of this magnitude obviously are considerable, they are substantially less than the $8 million figure used in some press reports. Please be assured that we will report fully to appropriate congressional committees on these aspects of the operation upon completion of our review. Meanwhile, the Justice Department will make all efforts to recover the costs to the U.S. Government.

If you have any further questions, you may wish to contact Deputy Assistant Secretary John Bushnell in our Bureau of Inter-American Affairs on 632-8562.

Sincerely,

DB/ws

Douglas J. Bennet, Jr.
Assistant Secretary
for Congressional Relations

ARA/PPC:JSchreiber:mbb
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Clearances: Inter-Agency
ARA:GLister
ARA:JBushnell
H:ENef

EN/GW

ADAM BENJAMIN, JR.
1ST DISTRICT, INDIANA

COMMITTEE:
APPROPRIATIONS

WASHINGTON OFFICE:
1608 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515
TELEPHONE: (202) 225-2461

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Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, D.C. 20515

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DISTRICT OFFICES:
FEDERAL BUILDING
507 STATE STREET
HAMMOND, INDIANA 46320
(219) 932-5500 EXT. 281

FEDERAL BUILDING
610 CONNECTICUT STREET
GARY, INDIANA 46402
(219) 886-2411 EXT. 308

1601 NORTH INDIANA AVENUE
GRIFFITH, INDIANA 46319
(219) 923-5043

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ACTION
is assigned to
ARA

The Honorable Cyrus Vance
Secretary of State
Department of State
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I am writing to request that you take immediate action to assure recovery of expenses incurred by the federal government in the evacuation of the victims of the mass suicide in Guyana.

While it is my understanding that there is no official confirmation of this information, there has been widespread newspaper coverage of reports that a secret cache of $10-$12 million belonging to the People's Temple is held in bank accounts around the world. My office was advised by the State Department on November 29, 1978, that approximately $8 million in federal funds had been spent on the operation to date and the evacuation was still in progress.

The entire episode in Guyana is without question reprehensible and a tragedy of incomprehensible proportions. However, in light of the extraordinary circumstances surrounding the creation and eventual destruction of the Jonestown community, many of our citizens are concerned and outraged that the U.S. taxpayer should bear the burden of the costs of the evacuation of the victims of the suicide particularly since the host country refused to accept the responsibility of burial despite its U.S. foreign aid assistance.

I respectfully request that all efforts be made to locate and proceed against the money supposedly held in the bank accounts and urge you to apply all funds confiscated at the Jonestown site towards repayment of federal monies used in the operation.

(2)

Adam Benjamin

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Please advise me of any action and investigations underway at this time in regards to the above matter.

Your prompt cooperation and assistance is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Adam Benjamin, Jr.
Member of Congress

AB:bs